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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 5587
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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 1811
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 5874
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7865
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0702
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1085
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[11.](#) Gaza Operation

[12.](#) Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Over the weekend all media led with the IAF strikes in Gaza, which have killed over 300 Palestinians since Saturday (QOperation Cast LeadQ). The latest developments on Sunday were strikes at 40

tunnels along the Philadelphia Corridor as the defense establishment received approval to call up 6,700 reservists and that it considered sending ground forces deep into Gaza to burn down and destroy Hamas infrastructure. The Jerusalem Post reported that the IAF used a new bunker-buster that it received from the U.S. -- GBU-39 -- in strikes against Hamas targets. Many observers noted the paucity of Qassam rockets on Saturday and Sunday, yet on Saturday an Israeli was killed in a Qassam rocket strike in Netivot. Also, on Monday morning Israel Radio reported that in Ashkelon an Arab worker was killed and several other people wounded in a Grad rocket strike. Yediot cited the claim of FM Tzipi Livni's associates that DM Ehud Barak is trying to belittle her role in the operation.

The media reported on protests in East Jerusalem, Israeli Arab towns, the Arab world, and around the world. Gordon D. Johndroe, a White House spokesman, was quoted as saying that Hamas was responsible for the outbreak of violence and called its rocket attacks completely unacceptable. These people are nothing but thugs, he said. Israel is going to defend its people against terrorists like Hamas. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice issued a statement that said: The United States strongly condemns the repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and holds Hamas responsible for breaking the cease-fire and for the renewal of violence in Gaza. The cease-fire should be restored immediately. The United States calls on all concerned to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the innocent people of Gaza. Israel Radio quoted David Axelrod, President-elect Barack Obama's senior adviser, as saying on CBS-TV's Face the Nation yesterday: The fact is that there is only one president at a time. Leading media quoted Egyptian TV as saying that Gilad Shalit was injured during an Israeli attack. Yediot and other media quoted Israeli sources as saying that this may be psychological warfare.

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior Israeli diplomatic officials as saying that Israel is feeling no real pressure and that the amount of time the international community will sit relatively quietly on the sidelines depends on how things develop.

Leading media reported that this morning an Arab worker stabbed and wounded four people, one of them seriously, in the settlement of Kiryat Sefer. Israel Radio reported that Hamas' TV station urged Egyptian and Jordanian workers to leave their workplaces in Israel. The radio links the call to previous Hamas statements that it would resume suicide bombings.

11. Gaza Operation:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: Israel is entitled to exercise its right to self-defense, including via offensive measures. But it must not overreach on the ground.

Yoav Limor, the military correspondent of Israel TV, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: Hamas yesterday paid the first price for its sin of hubris, and its erroneous assessment of Israel and its tolerance. Now Israel needs to be careful.

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: The big idea, if it succeeds, is to pave the way for the Palestinian President back into Gaza.... But Abu Mazen cannot afford to return to Gaza on the turrets of IDF tanks.

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: [The Palestinians] terrible suffering is always translated into stronger hate for Israel and adds to their instinct of revenge.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: [The Islamists] may give Israel no choice but to topple their administration.... Hamas must be stopped. And the civilized world must help stop it.

Block Quotes:

I. "Defend, Don't Invade"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (12/29): QIsrael must adhere to the outline of Operation Cast Lead thus far, eschewing any major invasion that will end in occupation, a military administration and months (if not years) of fighting the local forces who will inevitably oppose the occupiers.... Reestablishing the cease-fire on better terms and with better supervision is a reasonable goal. Toppling the Hamas regime, or eradicating the last rocket factory where the last Hamas member is making the last Qassam rocket, are not reasonable goals, in part because they are unachievable without a prolonged presence on the ground in Gaza.... The initial aerial assault should lead to a diplomatic move whose goal is a genuine cessation of fire and the return of Gilad Shalit, without any winking or excuses by Hamas. Israel is entitled to exercise its right to self-defense, including via offensive measures. But it must not overreach on the ground.

II. "The Price of Hamas's Hubris"

Yoav Limor, the military correspondent of Israel TV, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (12/28): QHamas yesterday paid the first price for its sin of hubris, and its erroneous assessment of Israel and its tolerance. Now Israel needs to be careful not to err in terms of what Operation Cast Lead is capable of yielding. The Prime Minister and Defense Minister cautiously avoided setting lofty goals, such as an end to the rocket fire on Israel.... Hamas's chain of command was severed; its leaders (those who were not hurt) went underground; its activists were afraid to get out into the field in fear that they would be picked off. But all of that applied yesterday; today is another day and, from Hamas's perspective, it needs to be a day of revenge and restored pride.... Just one more warning: The military operation alone isn't truly going to change the situation in the south. It will create a platform, an opportunity, deterrence; but it cannot create a political arrangement. To that end the government is going to have to operate immediately in conjunction with the sane elements within the Palestinian Authority, with the Egyptians and Jordanians, with the U.S., Europe, and the UN. Ultimately, that is what will give the IDF the space necessary to achieve the unstated goals, providing Israel with an opportunity to achieve a real change in the reality that reigns in the south.

III. "The Flush in Hamas's Cheek"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/29): QThe big idea, if it succeeds, is to pave the way for the Palestinian President back into Gaza. The Air Force is bombing the Hamas security headquarters two weeks before the end of Abu Mazen's term. Nobody, not even the best of the pollsters, can guess the results of the election, if elections are even held, but Abu Mazen cannot afford to return to Gaza on the turrets of IDF tanks.... Ultimately, as we've learned, we will return to the point of origin. The Mubarak punching bag will deflate and Egypt will again conduct the negotiations. The question is if Israel wants to return to a limited truce that is liable to blow up again, or should it strive for a more in-depth discussion and seek creative solutions.

IV. "Within the Warm Belly of the Consensus"

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/29): QThe warm consensus does not allow us to show empathy to the suffering of the other side.... Mothers who are bemoaning their children, elderly, fathers, and innocent civilians are paying the price of Hamas's careless cruelty.... At least we should know that [this pain] exists.... This is a moral issue, which also has a practical side: Their terrible suffering is always translated into stronger hate for Israel and adds to their instinct of revenge. The more we think about the innocent civilian population and try to minimize its suffering, the better things will be for us, too.

V. QA Time to Fight

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/28):

QThe IDF's mission is not to bring down the Hamas regime, but to bring quiet to the South. In a sense we are asking Hamas to stop being Hamas. The Islamists need to decide whether they want to go down in flames or are prepared to take on the responsibilities that come with control over the Strip. They may give Israel no choice but to topple their administration.... The formula for purchasing the affection of those who suffer from moral relativism is sickeningly clear: If one Jew is killed, we get very little piety. If, heaven forbid, an Israeli kindergarten was to take a direct hit -- Israel might, temporarily, gain the sympathy of news anchors from Paris to London to Madrid. At that price we would rather forgo their sympathy. Nevertheless, we expect our diplomats to work 24/7 to make Israel's case to the international community. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni has begun that process. In an English-language address she said, QEnough is enoughQ -- Israel would not continue to absorb rockets, mortars and bullets without retaliating. At this newspaper, we wonder how an international community that can't bring itself to explicitly support Israel's operation against the most intransigent of Muslim fanatics expects to play a positive role in facilitating peace in this region. Hamas must be stopped. And the civilized world must help stop it.

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QThis conflict does not lack marketing or attention, but this is a double-edged sword: The world has had enough of it, and small public-relations victories do not bring a solution closer in a situation where time works to no one's benefit.

Block Quotes:

"A Moment before Stepping into the Quicksand"

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/29): QWhile work is underway to market the conflict to the new U.S. president in the new wrapping of the Annapolis process, Israel has more urgent things to do. There is Gaza, there are elections. Sources in the Israeli Embassy in Washington say that at the top of the agenda of issues requiring urgent American attention is Iran as a multidimensional threat, and at this stage it seems simpler to reach an agreement with Syria. It seems Abbas can wait. The question is, to what extent the new U.S. administration will want to be the new kindergarten teacher and persuade the parties that the United States is a friend to both. If the Bush ideology is to be replaced with a promotion of American interests, America will not neglect the conflict that endangers the stability of a region important to it. But the new President has no reason to risk his prestige in a hasty involvement in a peace process that has tripped up a number of his predecessors.... The process may be upgraded by promoting an atmosphere of peace in the region through the Arab countries. This conflict does not lack marketing or attention, but this is a double-edged sword: The world has had enough of it, and small public-relations victories do not bring a solution closer in a situation where time works to no one's benefit.

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